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THE JUMEL MANSION

BY WILLIAM HENRY SHELTON

JUMEL MANSION may be paraphrased as a house of the Seven Fables. If we turn to such dignified authority as Harper's *Cyclopedia of History* we find "Jumel (Eliza Bowen), society leader. Born at sea in 1769." Appleton's *Cyclopedia of Biography* locates the place of her birth at sea as between France and the West Indies and adds the statement that her mother's name was Capet and that she died at the birth of her child and that the child was adopted by a Mrs. Thompson at Newport.

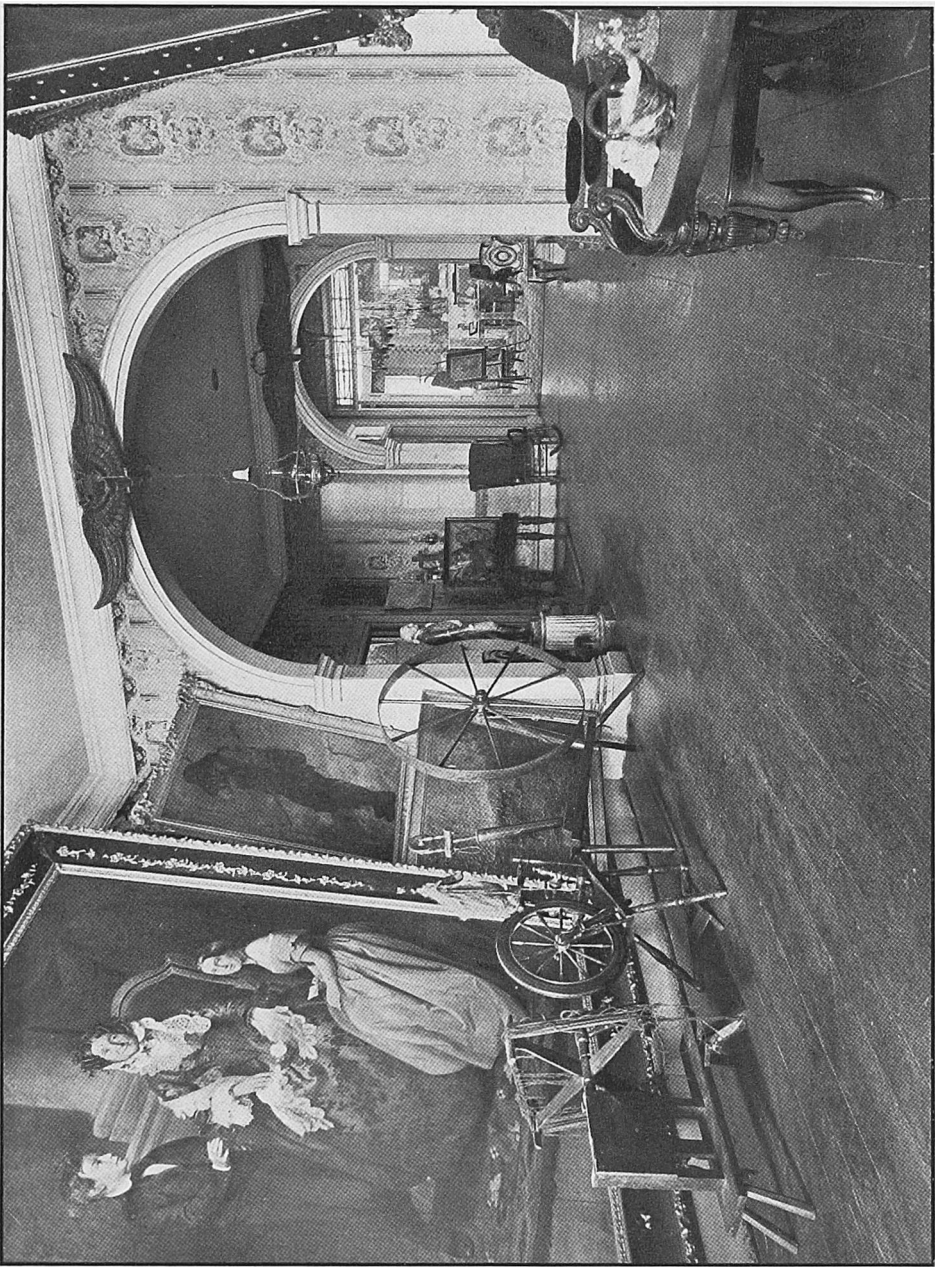
How such fables as these gained a foothold in history we may only conjecture. To conceal the real story of her birth and early career in Providence, Rhode Island, was a prime object with Madame Jumel in her lifetime, and such concealment was zealously attended to by the heirs who remained under the roof of the mansion. Her maiden name was Betsy or Eliza Bowen. After her relations with de la Croix—if there was any de la Croix—she finally married Stephen Jumel under the name of Eliza Brown. By the records of Old St. Patrick's Cathedral in Prince Street, New York, it was "Elizabethum Brown" to Stephanus Jumel. This change of name was an effort to separate herself more effectually from the evil reputation of her forebears in Providence. The story of her birth at sea and of her mother by the name of Capet, who so conveniently died at the birth of her child, was probably invented under the broad roof of Jumel Mansion, and most likely to begot and offset the revelations of a famous trial, that of George Washington Bowen, the

natural son of Madame Jumel, against Nelson Chase and the other heirs in possession of the Jumel estate. This trial, which dragged along in the courts for thirteen years, revealed the origin of Betsy Bowen and the degraded life of her family in Providence, and the "transcript of the record" or book of the trial, published for the review of the case by the Supreme Court at Washington, put the evidence on record. The edition of this book, however, was a very limited one, probably about sixteen copies for court use, and most of these have disappeared. The official copy is buried in the shelves of the Congressional Library at Washington. One copy has found its way to the John Hay Library of Brown University at Providence, and the book that belonged to the plaintiff is at this moment in Toronto, Canada, in possession of the present claimant.

How the story of the birth at sea, if invented in the mansion, ever got into the cyclopedias is an interesting question. It may have been published first in one of the numerous novels in which Madame Jumel has been exploited. It was heroic treatment of an unpleasant record and as usual the fable has outlived the fact.

The interest of the public in the history of Jumel Mansion seems to center on the history of its most noted mistress. Both Mrs. Roger Morris and Mary Philipse as well as Betsy Bowen as Mrs. Stephen Jumel, came to the Mansion from Whitehall Street; but Mary Philipse's career was tamely respectable.

The life of Madame Jumel reads like a leaf out of



HALL IN THE JUMEL MANSION

AS IT NOW IS



FIG. 1

the book of the fairies. She began as Cinderella, became the Princess in the Paris of Louis XVIII., and then resumed her place in the chimney-corner on her return to America.

At the age of ten we find her in the workhouse at Providence, Rhode Island, and her older sister, unlike the proud sisters of Cinderella, shared her humble abode. Her mother was in jail. Saint-Memin engraved her portrait in 1797 as Madame de la Croix. About 1800 she became the mistress of Stephen Jumel, which relation, openly flaunted in the face of straight-laced little old New York of that day, was hotly resented. As the wife of Stephen Jumel a few years later she was ignored, and his purchase of the Mansion and removal to it looks like a last bid for social recognition for his ambitious wife. Even this supreme effort was foredoomed to failure and, after five years of neglect in the great house, the disappointed pair closed its doors behind them and sailed away for France in one of Jumel's ships, the *Eliza*, named after his wife.

It was their totally unexpected luck to arrive in Paris a few days before Napoleon gave himself into the hands of the English. Stephen Jumel is said to have offered his ships to the falling Emperor to compass his escape to America. It seems to have been through this generous offer and the vogue that it gave them in Paris that these voyagers for adventure literally fell into the arms of the French nobility. Stephen Jumel was rich enough to set up a suitable establishment for his aspiring wife, at first in the Hôtel de Berteuil, No. 22 Rue de Rivoli, and afterwards at No. 16 Place Vendôme, and to give her a carriage with postilions in the fashion of that day. This woman who had been ignored in New York was able to give the dust of the boulevards to Louis XVIII in Paris. It was one of her specific boasts in her dotage that when she drove by the carriage of the King one day, Louis asked of his attendants whose establishment that was?

and on being informed that it was Madame Jumel's he said "Ah! let Madame Jumel pass!"

The date of the building of the house was one of the persistent fables repeated in all the histories for more than half a century. It probably emanated from the mansion. When the war was over and the historians began their work the Morris and Philipse families were in England. Even the ladies of those exiled families, including the first mistress of the Mansion, had been attainted of treason by the State of New York with a penalty of death by hanging "without benefit of clergy" if caught. In the absence of its builders it was natural to go to the house itself for information, where they were probably told that it was built for the bride in 1758.

At the time of the marriage of Roger Morris and Mary Philipse, 1758, the land on which the house now stands was the property of the Dyckman family. In 1763 it was sold to James Carroll and by him in 1765 to—probably—Roger Morris. When the City bought the house in 1903 the pediment bore great iron figures 1758. If the house was built in 1765 it was one hundred and fifty years old last year, and it is to-day as sound on its granite foundation as when it was built.

The original kitchen in the basement of the house, now somewhat curtailed, was quite baronial in its generous proportions—twenty by thirty feet. A great floor-beam twenty feet long spans its narrowest width. At the east end of this cellar-kitchen is the wide fireplace at which Washington's meat was roasted. This fireplace is a recent discovery;

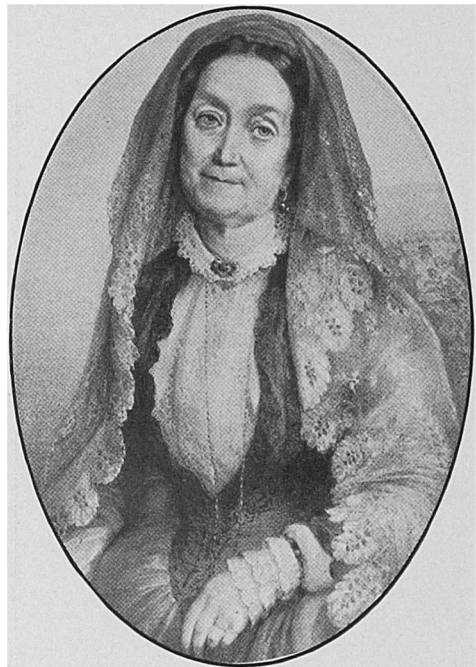


FIG. 2

it may be entered through a hole in its bricked-up face and explored candle in hand. At one end is an arched opening like a mortuary cell, which is the door of the Dutch oven where the bread and the pies went in and came out, and where the oven-ashes could be raked into the fireplace itself—at some inconvenience to the cook if a brisk fire chanced to be burning on the hearth! At the top of the chimney is a far-away patch of blue sky which alone has looked into this dark place for nearly a hundred years.

General Washington came to the house some time during the night of Saturday September 14th 1776, a few hours before the landing of the British in New York, and remained until the 18th of October when General Howe was landing near New Rochelle to capture him. For ten days before General Washington came the house had been occupied by the officers of General Heath's picket. This picket was established to watch the contiguous shores for the expected landing of the enemy and ceased to be when that landing was effected. Roger Morris was in London watching the military horizon and Mrs. Morris and her children were probably with Mrs. Frederick Philipse in the manor-house at Yonkers; so that General Washington was not obliged to dispossess a lady for whom he had a profound respect in order to take possession of her house.

On the Friday after his arrival New York was set on fire by some zealous young patriots with the intention of burning the enemy out. This fire was visible from the little balcony under the south portico during all that night, until the burning spire of Trinity Church fell into the smoking ruins.

It was an interesting period when Washington occupied the house. Ebenezer Hazard, the postmaster of New York, came down from Dobb's Ferry on the Hudson with his little post office and settled himself somewhere on the grounds. Ebenezer Hazard may have had his New York Post Office in the laundry, or he may have been as far away as the farmhouse, but when headquarters

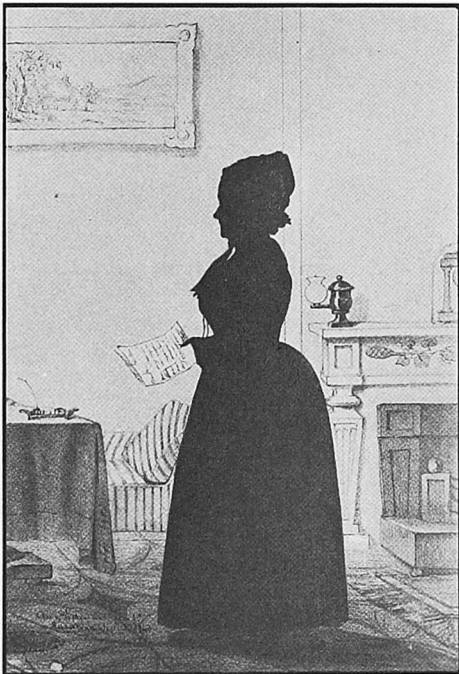


FIG. 3

moved he trudged along after it on foot until the little army passed out of the State of New York. His trials were not forgotten by President Washington who made him the First Postmaster-General of the New Nation.

Lt.-Colonel Samuel Blatchley Webb in the Adjutant-General's office was something of a postmaster too. He handled the correspondence of the fine ladies in the vicinity, notably that of the ladies at the manor-house who were just plain Philippses then, having long before discarded the old and the

present spelling. In the marriage settlement of Mary Philipse drawn up in 1758 the name is always Phillips. On one occasion the lady of the manor-house writes to Colonel Webb:

"Mrs. Phillips' Compliments to Collo. Webb for his polite note of yesterday, & the very acceptable packet from Middletown.

Mrs. Phillips acknowledges herself much obliged to Collo. Webb for his attention in forwarding her letters. . . . She begs her compliments to General Washington."

At daybreak the post riders trotted out from the great gates, Jacob Odell or Uriah Mitchel for the Convention at Fishkill on Hudson and a rider bearing dispatches for the Congress at Philadelphia. Major Backus's Connecticut Cavalry, otherwise known in Connecticut as "The Gentlemen of the Horse," furnished the orderlies and messengers at headquarters. It was one of these Gentlemen Captains who was seen by the Adjutant-General, Colonel Reed, seated on the lawn lathering and shaving one of the private Gentlemen of the Horse. Soldiers were very independent in those days and it actually happened while General Washington occupied the house that the men of two Connecticut regiments, having no uniforms, went home to pick apples and split fence-rails and see the children, until but thirty men remained in one regiment and twenty in the other.

During the latter part of General Washington's occupation of the house he was very much on the alert for an attack from the direction of the City of New York, and on many a morning in October his little army was under arms before daylight. This was at the time that General Howe, far from contemplating a frontal attack, was planning the landing of his forces at "Frog's" or Throgg's Neck, with the expectation of capturing the little army. A month later the British and Hessian army, about 14,000 strong, returning in leisurely march from White Plains, captured the Heights and the fort and the house. This was on the 14th of November and there were nearly 3,000 men in the fort, which was Fort Washington that day and Fort Mifflin the next. Lt.-General Earl Percy seems to have occupied the house for a few days after making a bloodless march up the King's Bridge road as far as the Fort. We have to thank him for a very good map of the vicinity of the headquarters made by his engineer officer Claude Joseph Sauthier, showing the house itself under the label "Col. Morris" with the upper earth-work extending into the kitchen garden on the opposite side of the road.

The next summer (1777) the house was the headquarters of the British army in America, its commander, Lt.-General Sir Henry Clinton, occupying the former quarters of Washington. He



FIG. 4



FIG. 5

came on the 14th of July and remained until the 9th of November. He sailed up the Hudson from the Morris house to capture the American forts. According to his Adjutant-General, Major Stephen Kemble, in his diary for October 6: "About Sunset Sir Henry Clinton attacked Forts Montgomery and Clinton and carried them by storm." Sir Henry refused to let

the Adjutant-General go with him on the Fort Montgomery and Clinton expedition; but the next year, when Major André was in that position, he sent his Adjutant-General to the front and remained in the rear himself.

"Sunday, Nov. 9th. Left Morris's House and came to town; Sir Henry Clinton taken up his quarters in Kennedy's House."

When the November weather began to pinch on the Heights, Sir Henry returned to the city to attend the performances at the "Theater Royal" and hold dress parade in front of the ruins of Trinity Church and ride out every morning to his favorite five-alley on upper Broad Way.

In the summer 1778 the house was the summer headquarters of Lt.-General Baron von Knypphausen and his Hessian Staff. He came on July 23d after the Philadelphia campaign and remained until November ninth.

Imagine Jumel Mansion with a Hessian soldier, as Dunlap describes him, posted at the front door "with his towering brass-fronted cap, mustacios colored with the same material that colored his shoes, his hair plastered with tallow and flour, and tightly drawn into a long appendage, reaching from the back of his head to his waist, his blue uniform almost covered by the broad belts sustaining his cartouche box, his brass-hilted sword and his bayonet; a yellow waistcoat with flaps and yellow breeches were met at the knee by black gaiters, and thus heavily equipped, he stood at attention and received the command or the cane of the officer who inspected him."

Madame Jumel, whose eccentricities are a part of the history of the Mansion, occupied it in solitary state during the last three years of her life, with one old servant-attendant. She was harmlessly demented during this period, and indeed for more than twenty years before her death

she was of unsound mind. It was about 1842 that she set up the table with broken ornaments, *à la* Havisham, that she claimed represented the remains of a banquet given to Joseph Bonaparte, whom she never entertained. Quoting from the story of her life:

"It was in the year 1857, according to Mr. Edwin Bradbrook who lived in Carmansville, that Madame

Jumel organized her military company and maintained for a time an armed garrison, including a brass band. This curious proceeding seems to have been prompted by a benevolent impulse. Having heard that some French immigrants down in the city were out of work and in distress, she got them together on the Heights and formed them into a company with a band and maintained them all winter. At that time, it is said, sentries were posted at the gates, and the soldiers passed in review before Madame Jumel and fired volleys at her command.

"Some of the details of this military exploit in mobilizing by the poor demented lady may have been enlarged upon in the telling, but all the old residents on Washington Heights who remember Madame Jumel remember her company of soldiers and the brass band. Was it a feeble effort of the old house to live up to its martial past? . . .

"Mr. George Luckey of Closter, New Jersey, and one of the patrons of the museum, used to spend his summers, when a boy, at the country house of his family on Morris Heights overlooking High Bridge. With some of his boy companions he was fond of fishing in the Harlem River and his favorite fishing ground was on that part of the river directly opposite to One Hundred and Sixtieth Street affording an unobstructed view of the Jumel Mansion and grounds.

"Mr. Luckey thinks that he was about twelve years old at the period he refers to, and that the year was 1850. At times, when the boys were fishing, he states that Madame Jumel would appear at about ten o'clock in the morning mounted on a horse and followed by from fifteen to twenty men, marching like soldiers, each carrying a stick for a gun. He remembers her as very spare and thin, sitting as straight as a grenadier on her horse and turning about now and then to face her company, and



FIG. 7



FIG. 6

then resuming the march. The grounds were much larger then than now, and the first appearance of the military company and its strange commander was along the edge of the bluff, moving south on the ground now occupied by Edgecombe Avenue. The procession would disappear along the 159th Street side of the yard to reappear in due time as before. She would make a number of rounds with her company before disbanding and the boys sometimes formed their fishing boats in line as a sort of Naval salute. This movement was plainly to be seen, and Madame Jumel would halt when she noticed them and look very sternly in their direction. The boys had heard at that time that the strange lady was fabulously rich but as they expressed it 'dotty.'

* * * *

"Inspector Steers, who is eighty-four years old and now totally blind, is one of the old residents of Washington Heights who remembers the military company which he thinks consisted of about thirty men, and who, he says, were lodged in a great barn on the place. He knew the mansion from about 1850, and the men of the family, but his personal acquaintance with Madame Jumel was only during the last two years of her life, when he was a police officer whose duties sometimes took him to the mansion. He said she usually entertained him in the hall and would talk for hours, but exacted a certain amount of attention from her listener. It

was necessary to say 'Yes, Madame' frequently and 'Indeed' and 'Really, Madame' to keep her flow of talk at high tide. According to her boasting every President of the United States had, at some time, been in the house.

"Madame Jumel died on the 16th of July, 1865 in the last year of the Civil War. Her remains rest in the Jumel tomb in Trinity Cemetery on the slope overlooking the broad Hudson, while the remains of Stephen Jumel lie in the consecrated ground of the old St. Patrick's Cathedral on Prince Street.

"The poor demented lady breathed her last in that chamber of the old house known as Washington's Bedroom. She may be said to have died in state as a *grande dame* should, decked in all her jewels and powdered and rouged to the end. And this is no flight of imagination, but the very circumstantial testimony of Mrs. E. W. J. who as a young girl saw Madame Jumel on her deathbed. She relates that she was brought into the house by the doctor in attendance and led to the upper hall, where she was allowed to look through the door into the sick room. She saw an old woman lying in bed whose cap was gay with pink ribbons and whose face was very much powdered and rouged.

"Although she has forgotten the doctor's name she remembers that he told her that Madame Jumel insisted on having her face powdered and rouged every day."

William Henry Shelton

ART AND THE ARTIST

Does Art make the artist,
Or the artist make Art?
Of the couple in question,
Which one had the start?

In these days of culture
So called, it would seem
Some artists consider
That Art is a dream

To be changed to a nightmare
Whenever they choose
To have indigestion,
And thereby abuse

The God-given spirit,
Whatever it is
Which leads the true artist
To the best that is his.

From which the conclusion
In whole or in part,
That Art makes the artist—
Not the artist makes Art.

He may think that he does
And give it Art's name
But the God that is in him
Is held up to shame

By the work he is doing,
Unheeding the part
He is playing as artist
Who tries to make Art.

W. J. Lampton